

The background papers on the candidate national program priorities are intended to initiate further discussion. When priorities are selected more detailed strategies with in-depth background information, numerical targets, schedules, milestones and performance measures will be developed.

Proposed Priority: Environmental Justice

Ensure that no racial, ethnic nor socioeconomic group bears a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial activities or from the execution of federal, state, and local programs and policies. Target one or more areas within each Region for focused attention on environmental justice (EJ) concerns.

Countless independent studies have concluded that communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental harms and risks. These communities are often required to host polluting facilities that no one else wants. Often, it is not just one pollution generating facility, but a combination of incinerators, waste dumps, wastewater treatment facilities, refineries and factories that impact the same community. The effects of these multiple sources of pollution can be severe, especially on children and the elderly. In some cases, these communities are ill-equipped to address the problems on their own and require assistance through a variety of sources. In the most severe cases, however, enforcement is needed to address chronic concerns.

Geographic Range

Environmental justice concerns are prevalent in every region of the country encompassing urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Environmental Risks

There are a variety of impacts associated with multiple sources of pollution in one community. Many communities suffer from cumulative impacts in which health threats come from more than one source. Further, synergistic impacts are possible where two pollutants combined together create a more toxic substance and pose a greater health threat than each pollutant would on its own. The risk is often compounded in communities consisting of sensitive populations that have pre-existing illnesses and diseases placing them at greater risk from exposure to pollutants. In addition to these serious health risks, communities that have more than their fair share of industrial and commercial activity also can suffer social effects such as noise and traffic problems and economic effects such as reduced property values, lost wages, and medical bills.